

# [***The Entire Push To Halt New Natural Gas Exports Traces Back To One Ivy League Prof And His Shaky Study***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPM-9T21-DXXD-7018-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

[*Link to Image*](https://cdn01.dailycaller.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Robert-Howarth-e1709837953750.png)

A questionable study by a Cornell University climate scientist gave climate activists and the media ammunition to wage a pressure campaign against the Biden administration to take action against liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports.

Cornell's Robert Howarth authored the October 2023 [*study*](https://www.research.howarthlab.org/publications/Howarth_LNG_assessment_preprint_archived_2023-1103.pdf), which purported to find that lifecycle emissions associated with LNG exports are far greater than those attributable to domestically-mined coal. [*Numerous*](https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/liquefied-natural-gas/the-big-battle-brewing-over-lng-exports) [*media*](https://www.desmog.com/2023/11/10/steingraber-study-overwhelming-harms-fracking/) [*outlets*](https://newrepublic.com/article/176605/natural-gas-way-worse-coal), including [*The New York Times*](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/26/climate/cp2-natural-gas-export-louisiana.html), amplified the study, and climate activists lobbying the Biden administration to kill LNG exports cited it as evidence to substantiate their position before the White House [*announced*](https://dailycaller.com/2024/01/26/biden-lng-pause-superpower-energy/) the moratorium on LNG export terminal approvals on Jan. 26.

The study, titled “The Greenhouse Gas Footprint of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Exported from the United States,” found that “greenhouse gas emissions from LNG are also larger than those from domestically produced coal, ranging from 44% to more than 2-fold greater for the average cruise distance of an LNG tanker.” Howarth, who openly opposes the use of fossil fuels, admitted to releasing his study before it was peer-reviewed in order to influence the LNG export debate.

“According to the ethical guidelines from several of the professional societies to which I belong, scientists have a duty to provide information to the public and to decision-makers on important public issues when they have access to such information,” Howarth told the DCNF.

Howarth [*said*](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2024-02-29/biden-lng-approval-pause-influenced-by-cornell-methane-scientist) environmental activist Bill McKibben was the one who convinced him to release the study before it underwent the months-long peer review process. McKibben himself [*wrote*](https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/a-smoking-gun-for-bidens-big-climate-decision) about the study in The New Yorker in October 2023, touting it as evidence that the Biden administration should not expand LNG export capacity.

After McKibben published his piece for The New Yorker and Howarth released the study to the public, the duo joined a November 2023 press call alongside several climate activists and Democratic lawmakers - including Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley - to talk about the issue of LNG exports, [*according*](https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2023/11/08/dems-tout-study-saying-lng-is-dirtier-than-coal-00125771) to E&E News.

“From what I am told by reporters and what I read in the press, yes, my paper has had some impact,” Howarth said.

Indeed, The Wall Street Journal [*reported*](https://www.wsj.com/finance/commodities-futures/robert-howarth-cornell-climate-liquified-natural-gas-2a75fb98) Howarth's work influenced the Biden administration's decision to pause approvals for new LNG export hubs.

Howarth's study “clearly was a factor in the Biden administration's decision to pause making the required determinations required for approval of new LNG export projects and launching a U.S. Department of Energy study of the climate impact of LNG exports,” Steven Hamburg, the Environmental Defense Fund's chief scientist, [*told*](https://phys.org/news/2024-03-methane-scientist-biden-lng.html#:~:text=Howarth's%20study%20%22clearly%20was%20a,chief%20scientist%20at%20the%20Environmental) Bloomberg News.

The White House invariably felt pressure from left-wing lawmakers and environmental activists who regularly cited the study in their push to choke off U.S. natural gas exports.

Merkley cited the Howarth study as “the latest climate science” in a November 2023 [*letter*](https://www.merkley.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/23.11.14-DOE-LNG-Letter.pdf) to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm. Sixty-four other lawmakers signed that letter, which called on Granholm to update her agency's review process for LNG export facilities to include climate impacts.

Likewise, the Sierra Club [*promoted*](https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/liquefied-natural-gas-facility-next-carbon-bomb) a story that cited the study and referred to one of the affected LNG export hubs as a “carbon bomb.” A disruptive outfit called Climate Defiance [*promoted*](https://x.com/ClimateDefiance/status/1721715495689175291?s=20) the study on social media before [*meeting*](https://dailycaller.com/2023/12/29/white-house-climate-defiance-harassed-biden-officials-podesta/) in December 2023 with Senior Advisor to the President John Podesta to lobby against the planned expansion of LNG export capacity. [***(RELATED: Biden Admin Leaned On Questionable And Misleading Science To Justify Halting Natural Gas Hub Approvals)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/17/biden-admin-questionable-misleading-science-natural-gas-pause/)

The best solution is to simply stop using fossil natural gas ASAP, as laid out in the Climate Action Council scoping plan (Dec 2022). If the State follows the plan, gas use will fall by 50% within 10 yrs. It's time to start dismantling the pipeline system, not rebuilding it. [*https://t.co/UglBTnk0ji*](https://t.co/UglBTnk0ji)

- Robert Howarth (@howarth\_cornell) [*April 24, 2023*](https://twitter.com/howarth_cornell/status/1650576521726156805?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Scores of environmental groups cited Howarth's study in a [*letter*](https://subscriber.politicopro.com/eenews/f/eenews/?id=0000018e-150f-d469-afbe-dd8f83fa0000) sent to President Joe Biden applauding his Jan. 26 decision to pause new LNG export terminals. In their letter, eco-activists also demanded Biden “[stop] all LNG and related fossil fuel infrastructure permits across all U.S. federal agencies.”

**'Widely Panned And Largely Dismissed'**

Howarth's findings contradict plenty of existing research on the subject, including two Department of Energy (DOE) studies from [*2014*](https://www.energy.gov/fecm/articles/life-cycle-greenhouse-gas-perspective-exporting-liquefied-natural-gas-united-states) and [*2019*](https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/09/f66/2019%20NETL%20LCA-GHG%20Report.pdf), which concluded that American LNG exports to Asia and Europe do not create more lifecycle emissions than regionally-mined coal when used to generate power. The Cornell professor's study has drawn the ire of the oil and gas industry, which has pointed out that Howarth's most recent findings are detached from a robust body of research on the subject.

“Dr. Robert Howarth openly admitted he prematurely released his not-yet-peer-reviewed study in order to influence ***politics*** and advance activist agendas against responsible oil and gas development,” Jeff Eshelman, the president and CEO of the Independent Petroleum Association of America, told the DCNF. “His research - which has been widely panned and largely dismissed by the scientific community - ignores the environmental benefits of U.S. natural gas and LNG, including data by the Department of Energy.”

Howarth - [*described*](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/power-switch/2024/02/05/the-science-fight-behind-bidens-gas-pause-00139580) by Politico as a “longtime sparring partner with the gas industry” - has [*come*](https://www.cfr.org/blog/some-thoughts-howarth-shale-gas-paper) [*under*](https://reason.com/2011/05/26/is-natural-gas-really-worse-th/) fire for peddling shaky science about natural gas in the past. Back in 2012, he [*told*](https://nypost.com/2012/01/24/killing-drilling-with-farcical-science/) a columnist for the New York Post that he was trying to make the anti-fracking movement more mainstream and trendy.

Howarth himself is closely tied to environmental activism. He is a [*board member*](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/staff/board-of-directors/) for [*Food and Water Watch*](https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/food-and-water-watch/) (FWW), a green nonprofit that has [*campaigned*](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/tag/natural-gas/) against natural gas development and exploration in New York state, though he denies this unpaid position influences his work.

His new paper was funded in part by the [*Park Foundation*](https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/park-foundation/), a left-wing nonprofit with a stated [*goal*](https://www.parkfoundation.org/funding-priorities/environment/) of “[challenging] continued shale gas extraction and infrastructure expansion” and a strong [*presence*](https://www.parkfoundation.org/who-we-are/our-founders-history/) in New York state, where Howarth's university is located. Howarth told the DCNF the Park Foundation's “modest” financial support of the study did not constitute a conflict of interest, and that the organization has no influence over his work.

The Park Foundation's environment committee “recognizes that a firm stance against further oil and gas development is a necessary component to future funding decisions” and is resolved to support initiatives that “commit to the 'keep it in the ground' philosophy” or otherwise resist oil and gas drilling and infrastructure expansion, [*according*](https://www.parkfoundation.org/funding-priorities/environment/) to the organization's website.

The Park Foundation gave Cornell University more than $530,000 to support natural gas-related academic work between 2010 and 2021, [*according*](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1C4cpA2uzbn_XNNsUUbYZt4n71RnLnStd8sVjEezyJgc/edit?usp=sharing) to a DCNF review of tax filings.

Howarth's study cites seven of his own previous papers, of which at least five were funded in part by the Park Foundation, a DCNF [*review*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GVEQBfd3Lgf5vS4cScAIoKH2Z8kAqt9vRGvQLT_NIb8/edit?usp=sharing) of those studies found.

Howarth routinely slams Republicans on social media, [*castigating*](https://x.com/howarth_cornell/status/1751058529270616204?s=20) the “party of disinformation and misinformation” as a “[*cult*](https://x.com/howarth_cornell/status/1709360407767371800?s=20)” whose members “simply do not care about truth.” He's also vocal in his opposition to the continued use of fossil fuels.

“I definitely consider myself to be an objective scientist,” Howarth said. “I also am a citizen, and as such have an ethical obligation to participate in our society. So no, I am not apolitical. But I am confident that my political views do not affect my scientific research.”

**'Not A Guarantee Of Quality Or Accuracy'**

Howarth arrived at his topline finding by calculating the emissions caused by natural gas exports at every stage - from initial extraction to processing to final destination and end use - and comparing those emissions to the amount generated by every step of domestic coal extraction and use.

But Howarth has revised his study several times since releasing his study to the public. The [*initial version*](https://web.archive.org/web/20231111010225/https:/www.research.howarthlab.org/publications/Howarth_LNG_assessment_preprint_archived_2023-1103.pdf) asserted that the lifecycle emissions of LNG exports are greater than those of domestically-produced coal, with the difference ranging between 24% and 274%. The study was updated on Jan. 13 to reflect that “total greenhouse gas emissions from LNG are larger than those from domestically produced coal, ranging from 27% to 2‐fold greater for the average cruise distance of an LNG tanker.”

Howarth [*announced*](https://x.com/howarth_cornell/status/1768084063661723685?s=20) on March 13 that he had again revised his study “using this new estimate, 4.6% emissions (not including urban/surburban (sic) distribution systems) for the best studied major U.S. shale gas fields.”

After the March update, the study now asserts that LNG exports can have lifecycle emissions that are greater than those of domestic coal by between 44% and 200% or more.

These updates have come under considerable criticism from the oil and gas industry and scholars.

William Jordan - general counsel for EQT, a natural gas company based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - suggested to the WSJ that Howarth cherry-picked data and leaned on flawed assumptions to pursue influence rather than understanding.

“I received two anonymous reviews from the journal just before Christmas, as well as input from people who had read the original version online. I revised the manuscript based on these comments, and submitted it back to the journal on January 13,” Howarth told the DCNF in defense of his updates.

“The version posted online now is the latest version,” Howarth told the DCNF. “It is very much standard to revise in response to peer review comments. That is precisely what peer review is about!” [***(RELATED: Could Joe Biden's Natural Gas Pause Cost Dems The Senate In November?)***](https://dailycaller.com/2024/02/28/natural-gas-democrats-casey-biden-pennsylvania-senate-2024/)

GHG emissions from LNG are far greater than for conventional natural gas. LNG is a climate disaster. [*https://t.co/dq1EVgaHCz*](https://t.co/dq1EVgaHCz)

- Robert Howarth (@howarth\_cornell) [*September 26, 2023*](https://twitter.com/howarth_cornell/status/1706683424142930033?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

Roger Pielke Jr., a former academic who has written extensively about politicized science, told the DCNF that while such practices are common, they're less than ideal.

“The posting of pre-prints is now standard practice in many fields, and they are exactly that - pre-prints,” Pielke said. “That said, passive peer-review is not a guarantee of quality or accuracy, but in many cases a minimal check for quality. No one paper offers the last word, and these days, studies are often conducted with an outcome in mind.”

“That imposes a challenge on all of us, journalists especially, to be careful and critical consumers of the latest and greatest science,” Pielke said. “Too often published research is used to support favored and previously-held positions rather than considered on its merits.”

Howarth's study also heavily relies on a 20-year timeframe to assess the impacts of emissions from LNG exports. Typically, researchers adopt a 100-year outlook, a number which Howarth describes as “arbitrary” in his work.

“Using [the twenty-year timeframe], LNG always has a larger greenhouse gas footprint than coal,” Howarth writes in the study.

“What we see here is the standard climate activist and Biden administration formula at play,” David Blackmon, a 40-year veteran of the oil and gas industry who now writes and consults on the energy sector, told the DCNF. “First, you allege a problem exists without any scientific basis. Then, you identify a 'study' with findings you like that can be used to form a basis for policy advocacy, which you pass onto your former fellow activists who are now in the administration, and let them run with it.”

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**Graphic**

Robert Howarth, a climate scientist at Cornell University, talks about climate change and international climate policy. (YouTube / Screenshot / Public - User: Cornell University Media Relations & News)

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